

## Procedures for Effective Teacher Parent Communication

Date: September 2010

### 1. Context/Rationale

These procedures have been developed as a guide for all teachers so that they are able to communicate with all parents within the school, in a positive and constructive manner. A positive rapport between teachers and parents is an important component in all school wide communication.

### 2. Aims

- 2.1 To enable all teachers to feel that they are well supported in dealing with parent issues in relation to the education of all children.
- 2.2 To have processes in place to deal with issues raised by parents in a professional and timely manner.
- 2.3 To resolve issues and concerns to the satisfaction of both teachers and parents.

### 3. Implementation

- 3.1 This document outlines a series of guiding steps for teachers and Leaders to follow when communicating with parents and dealing with issues raised by parents. Three distinct scenarios are addressed in this document.

Firstly, a parent approaches their child's teacher.

Secondly, a parent approaches another teacher at the school.

Thirdly, a parent approaches the Office to arrange a time to discuss this with the School Leadership.

**Please note:** Whilst the following steps in each scenario are a guide, they will not account for every circumstance that arises.

#### 3.2 Parents approach a teacher to discuss an issue. The teacher will: -

1. Meet with a parent if time permits and speak to the parent there and then. If not, make a time convenient for both to meet. Request an indication as to the nature of the concern that the parent wishes to discuss.
2. Contact a Leader to meet with the parent if the parent needs to be heard 'now'. If there is an urgent issue that is best addressed by the teacher, seek a Leader to assist you, so that you can meet immediately.
3. Always consider alerting a teaching partner or a Leader that you are meeting with a parent or have a meeting pending. This also applies to Leaders.
4. Hold meetings in their room, or alternatively in the vicinity of the main office, such as the Conference Room or Meeting Room. Handy hint, sit on the side of the table closest to the exit in case the meeting needs to be stopped and you need to leave the meeting.

5. Consider having a Leader join the meeting if the teacher feels uncomfortable about an impending meeting, due to the anxiety expressed by the parents. This also applies to Leaders.

6. **When discussing a concern with a parent/s, teachers will: -**

- a. Seek to understand their concern.
- b. Ask questions to clarify the concern.
- c. Make notes of the parents' concern and confirm that you have interpreted their concern correctly.
- d. Where possible, provide an explanation, feedback or suggestion for the parent.
- e. Inform the parent of the steps you will take to have the matter addressed if the concern cannot be resolved, i.e. you may indicate that you will speak to the Principal/Assistant Principal.
- f. Make a time to follow up with the parent to resolve the concern.
- g. Consider speaking to the parents at a later date to confirm that things are now resolved.

7. **Dealing with a difficult meeting: -**

If a meeting with a parent becomes difficult and you do not feel comfortable in continuing the discussion:

- a. Tell the parent that the discussion is finishing.
- b. Assure the parent that you will follow up the concern and then make contact.
- c. Indicate a time when, you or someone else, will contact them.
- d. Leave the room and go to the office and inform the Principal/Assistant Principal/School Leader of the matter.
- e. Some aspects to remember: -
  1. Always try to remain calm.
  2. Do not tolerate language or behaviour which is inappropriate or intimidating.
  3. Try to remain objective in what you say (not judgemental).

8. **If a Parent/Teacher/Student Conference becomes difficult: -**

The teacher will: -

- a. Advise the parents that the concerns need to be followed up at another time.
- b. Advise the parents that you will phone and make another time to meet.
- c. Walk to the door and open it for the parent/s and ask them to leave.
- d. Go to the office, or find a Leader for assistance, if the parents do not/will not leave.

### **3.3 When a Parent contacts another teacher: -**

1. The teacher approached will: -
  - a. Use their judgement to determine if they can reasonably answer the parents' question.
  - b. Inform the parent that arrangements will be made for the appropriate teacher to contact them.
  - c. Refer the parent immediately to the office to speak to the Principal/Assistant Principal or School Leader.
2. If you answer a parent question to their satisfaction, inform the classroom teacher that the parent/s have spoken to you about 'X'.
3. Tell the parents that you will get the class teacher to contact them. Make sure you speak to the class teacher as soon as possible.
4. Inform the office, Principal/Assistant Principal or School Leader that parent 'X' will be contacting them. It may also be beneficial to speak to the class teacher.
5. When a Leader speaks to a parent, follow the process outlined in Section 3.4.
6. If the parent does not approach the office or a Leader, as suggested, the Leader should make contact with the parent to follow up on the concern.
7. Whoever deals with the parent, (Principal/Assistant Principal or School Leader), they should inform the teacher about the concern.
8. Do's and Don'ts when dealing with a parent in relation to another teacher:  
The teacher will: -
  - a. Not give negative feedback in relation to the teacher.
  - b. Remain non-judgemental.
  - c. Always ensure they personally follow up on the concern brought to their attention by a parent, by speaking to the teacher concerned, or a Leader.
  - d. Not allow a parent to 'verbally off-load' in front of others about a colleague. If this happens, be assertive by saying, 'This is not the time or place to have this conversation. Please go and speak to 'X' about the matter.' If necessary, walk away.

### **3.4 When a Parent makes contact via the Office, or a Leader: -**

1. Not all parent concerns can be dealt with immediately at the office, or by a Leader.
2. All matters referred to the office or to a Leader, will be followed up as soon as possible.
3. If a parent raises a concern with a Leader the Leader will:
  - a. Listen to the parents' concern, or make a time to meet.
  - b. Inform the class teacher as soon as possible after meeting with a parent, about the concern.

- c. Inform the class teacher and seek information from the teacher about the concern, where a meeting is scheduled for another time.
- d. As a follow up the Leader may: -
  - Meet with the parent again.
  - Meet with the parent and the teacher together.
  - Inform the parent and teacher how the concern will be resolved.
- e. At all times, the Leader will endeavour to remain objective, non-judgemental and supportive of the teacher, with a view of achieving a win-win outcome to any situation.

**Notes: -**

1. This process applies to any Class teacher/Specialist teacher/Support teacher or Leader, across the school.
2. No matter what our status; Teachers, Leaders or Parents, we can all make mistakes. Sometimes we need to reflect and acknowledge that some decisions/actions could have been done a different way, or handled in a better way and determine how these will be handled in the future, then, move on.
3. **From: How to Handle Parents (Shine June: 2010, pp: 27-28): -**
  - a. 'The parent-carer relationship must be a two way street..... The ideal relationship should be mutual trust and respect...'
  - b. 'Parents should feel comfortable to make contact with teachers at any time, but respect the fact that teachers have a range of other responsibilities and may not be freely available.'
  - c. 'A key to the resolution of sensitive matters is that parents and teachers develop a mutual appreciation of the issue and how it may impact on a student... collaborative solutions can be devised.'
  - d. 'Stick to the facts', (in other words, always be objective).

### **3.5 Communicating 'Procedures for Effective Teacher Parent Communication'**

**3.5.1** An article will be placed on the school website about the process for parent/s to contact teachers to discuss matters of concern.

Each Term an article will also be placed in the Newsletter outlining our Teacher/Parent Communication processes.

Details of the Parent/Teacher Communication process will also be included in the School Operations Folder, given to staff at the start of the year and also included in our School Induction Program.

### **3.6 Principal/Assistant Principal response to staff complaints**

**3.6.1** In the event that a teacher expresses concern in relation to the manner in which a parent/s or community member has approached them with an issue, the Principal/Assistant Principal will: -

1. Record the teacher's concern.
2. Ensure that the teacher is provided with support and assistance.
3. Contact the parent concerned and follow up the matter.
4. In the interest of the health and safety of all staff, ensure that the parent concerned is informed of the appropriate manner for meeting with a teacher and addressing concerns. At the same time the parent will be informed of acceptable and unacceptable communication practices.
5. Ensure that a member of the Leadership Team, (Principal/Assistant Principal or School Leader) is available for future meetings between the teacher and parent concerned, as requested by the teacher.

#### **4. Evaluation:**

4 These procedures will be reviewed by staff on an annual basis.

These procedures were ratified by Staff .....

**September 2010**